

Crisis

BLACK PREDICTIONS

1. Predictions on the likelihood of events or the outcomes of certain policies are often given officially which diverge sharply from the private beliefs of the advisors. These predictions may be, tacitly or explicitly, conditional upon certain "assumptions" which the makers privately believe to be unrealistic.
2. These unrealistic assumptions--about the decisions or goals of the President, the behavior of the US government, the attitudes of the US public, the performance of our troops or commanders, the efficiency or speed of the decision-making process or response mechanisms, the decisions or effectiveness of allies--may be used because more realistic assumptions are "tabu," barred from explicit or even implicit employment.
3. Avoidance of "tabu" assumptions may be convenient because it simplifies the analysis, or because it leads to conclusions and recommendations that are desired and that cannot be challenged without questioning the "official acceptable" assumptions. But to the "layman" (often, the superior asking for the prediction) the unrealism of the conclusions may not be apparent; he may not realize the sensitivity of the conclusions to the "OK assumptions." He may really be led astray. And even if he tries to elicit a more realistic analysis, the predictor may not be willing to draw out the consequences of more realistic assumptions: because those assumptions really are tabu, because they are rarely used and lead to surprising and shocking results, or because they lead to prescriptions that he opposes (and you can't force him to think these particular forbidden thoughts officially--that is practically an "illegal order").
4. Examples: assumptions that the President might accede to an ultimatum, or that ~~the~~ an ally might; that the US public might virtually rebel at a US policy; or less dramatically, that a policy might be pursued at high or low levels irresolutely, waveringly, inconsistently, that decision times might be very long or response times very long, that internal conflict might produce erratic behavior, etc.
5. Even to voice these possibilities is tabu: because certain thoughts are forbidden and "disloyal"; because to believe them is ~~dangerously~~ to be dangerously unreliable, a critic and potential opponent, or leaker to the opposition; because even to mention them is to lend some authority to them (suggesting that one might believe them) and is to focus the attention of others upon them; and because for most purposes, optimum behavior by most component members of the administrative and political systems is achieved if they "take for granted" the official assumptions, ignoring these possibilities.
6. But people with long experience of the system may really be able to make more realistic assumptions--as to what will really influence the President, how long it will really take to accomplish a certain policy, how much resources will really be committed, how resolutely a certain path will be pursued--and these may be critical to realistic predictions. THEY WILL TYPICALLY HIDE THESE ASSUMPTIONS--AND THE PREDICTIONS BASED ON THEM--EXCEPT FROM CLOSE ASSOCIATES THEY TRUST NOT TO PUNISH THEM, AND WHO REQUIRE "SERIOUS" PREDICTIONS. SUCH PREDICTIONS ARE "BLACK"--COVERT, ESOTERIC, GUARDED--THEORIES OF SYSTEM BEHAVIOR.

CRISES

Miscalculation

Politicians/diplomats believe (?) almost nothing is irreversible, irrevocable (except the initiation of large-scale war): hence, practically anything is permissible for short-term political gains. They take gambles--the odds on which are better than the public realizations--some of which go bad: they really do have consequences.

In particular, inaction, or the postponing of action, is believed rarely to have irrevocable consequences (you can always act a little later and try a little harder, pay a little more, and recapture lost ground); this reduces the number of perceived crises:

A crisis is when the consequences of short-term inaction/postponement may be serious or irrevocable. (i.e., when ensuing developments may be much worse, or irretrievably worse, than the evolution following some action--either currently conceived or to-be-found--undertaken immediately)

If a given action were clearly better than inaction (and believed better than any others likely to be found), then no crisis. Otherwise, urgent search: either for information clarifying the short-term choice or for new actions.

Urgency is greater if the loss/pain is not merely to be determined by the immediate decision but ~~ix~~ may be experienced/suffered in the short-run (Time-discount doesn't operate, anticipated pain looms larger; responsibility will be more clearly linked to present decision or inaction; specifically, present decision-makers will still be around, to be held responsible and punished; short-term losses look more inescapable--long-term problems can't look quite as irretrievable, no matter what current theories imply, since an answer may always be found, present theories may be wrong, or some counterbalancing development whose nature not now imagined may occur).

Urgency also increased the more that the loss will be clearly attributable to this ~~xxx~~ choice of inaction or action, and these particular decision-makers (e.g., the more immediate the loss will be; but also, the more the public is aware that a decision, involving conscious consideration of alternatives, estimates, values, is being/has been made.

~~MYX~~ JUST AS "IGNORANCE IS AN EXCUSE," INATTENTION IS AN EXCUSE.

Leader can be criticised, "held responsible for" inattention (i.e., attention to something else), but it is not regarded as reasonable inference to read as much meaning into inaction accompanied by inattention. ~~Decision-maker~~ It cannot be inferred that the decision-maker "preferred" the inaction to "rejected" alternatives--hence, that his expectations or values must be such-and-such--when it appears that he was not considering alternatives (his mind was elsewhere). He can be punished for laziness, irresponsibility, inattentiveness: but not for wrong estimates or bad values (except to the extent that these led him to be inattentive--at the earlier moment when he began to be inattentive).

In all cases here, "inaction" is to be read as "inaction or continuance of current action, current program of actions, etc." Inaction = lack of output, or, lack of change in output (e.g., suppose output is a) repetitive or patterned, regardless of input/stimulus, or b) programmed as a response to input, without inputting to or requiring output from Controller.

CRISES

Responsibility (RAND, Buddhists and Bureaucrats)

Many factions in emerging country wish to exercise power, to influence organisation and personnel and policy and events, without being responsible for achievement or non-achievement of a goal. (Buddhists in SVN; don't want to be in government. Military may prefer to rule behind scenes.)

They don't want to be held accountable for failure to achieve goals, and will forgo credit for success; yet they want to feel powerful and to have their power known and acknowledged. These desires they can satisfy by avoiding office or situation in which they would have to implement their proposals, or invent solutions, but by exerting "unofficially" a negative influence, vetoing policies or people or arrangements by demonstrating, protesting, etc. Thus they may keep any policy from "working," on basis of claim that it has fatal flaws and must be discarded.

Office/responsibility would force them, on pain of sanctions (e.g., loss of office, prestige) to find/propose/implement positive solutions to problems, programs toward a goal; they would run the risk of being disliked by those who opposed these policies, and of being shown wrong, unwise.

"Responsibility" is not a good stimulus to coming up with new ideas, solutions, potential problems, new goals, new estimates or considerations that may invalidate current programs or policies. There may be little positive incentive for responsible person—who has a policy to carry out—to find these; and there are disincentives. The very existence of an articulated alternative—if the responsible person is not looking for one, or if he does not choose to adopt this one—can make his task harder (distract attention and support, cause doubts about his policy, uncertainty as to whether it will be continued, force him to spend time justifying his policy) and (b) increase the cost of failure (by supporting claims of those who say that he ~~knows~~ had an alternative and refused to take it).

Thus, the search for alternatives, or for "reasons to change policy; contingencies and considerations not looked at, ways this present policy can go bad" has risks for the responsible decision-maker. And it is an effort that may divert resources from his task: making present policy work, carrying out the subordinate tasks of the policy, monitoring results, etc.

That is why there must be a non-responsible RAND; and why RAND is such a pain in the neck to the responsible (especially those—staff—who have no responsibility for questioning or changing policy, only for receiving and implementing it).

Certain benefits go with responsibility; more control over resources, more continuous and detailed influence, and chance to win credit for successes; but price of these is that person must help find promising policies, and then must help make them work (he will share in punishment if they don't)—i.e., under some circumstances, he must refrain from voicing damaging criticisms, must help solve subordinate problems, must avoid pressing for too-frequent change that will, in sum, guarantee failure.

Cris

COMMUNICATION

Two people looking at the same stream of data/evidence may come to quite different conclusions, or find it difficult to communicate, because:

1. They are testing different hypotheses.
 - a. They may be testing the same point (null) hypothesis, but against different composite alternatives:
 1. They may have different subjective probability distributions over the separate hypotheses included in the alternative; e.g., one may assign high probability to a point hypothesis which the evidence favors strongly against the null hypothesis.
 2. They may differ in the hypotheses included in their alternatives; one may totally exclude certain hypotheses included by the other.
 3. They may compare the same null hypothesis to different point hypotheses.
 2. They may have different null hypotheses; or may be testing different pairs of composite hypotheses.

Thus the question (after watching the phenomena): "Well, what do you think now?" may not elicit an intelligible response (it seems to be addressed to entirely different matters; it may seem to have "no relation" to the evidence--since the questioner may not even recognize the relevance of the data to the hypotheses the answerer is considering, and he may not know what the latter are anyway), or at any rate, no response "addressed to the question" (in the mind of the questioner).

2. Their models may differ; so that the weight of evidence associated with the data favors different hypotheses.

- a. In particular, they may differ in what they consider the areas of ambiguity. They may hear/see "noise" in different parts of the likelihood function. (Is this like including different hypotheses, or assigning different probs to different hypotheses? Or is it better represented by "flatter" likelihood functions?)
- b. These differences may show bias. A non-obvious way of biasing the likelihood--so that evidence cannot undermine one's dominant beliefs, but may strengthen them (Polanyi)--is, not to argue with the relative bearing of evidence but to reduce the weight of unfavorable evidence by emphasizing its ambiguity. (It's true that this is likely when H--my favorite hypothesis--does not occur; but it's also fairly likely, though not perhaps quite so likely, when H does occur, because of--various causes of "false alarms," instrument malfunction, operator error, obscure linkages between H and this particular phenomenon...)

This may be deliberate (propaganda). Or there may be an unconscious mechanism that sets the "tester" searching for sources of ambiguity--"listening for noise"--when unfavorable evidence is seen or imagined.

Polanyi

Communication and Insurance

A reason for not taking out insurance (e.g., maintaining a friendship, or doing contingency planning) is:

It is desired--in order to influence someone--to give unequivocal evidence of very high confidence in something: e.g., high expectation that

- a. One will do something.
- b. Someone else will do something.
- c. Something will or will not happen.
- d. Certain resources will or will not be available.

e.g., "Souvanna Phouma ((after US strikes on DRV)) is encouraged to the point where he appears to be willing to place his confidence in the US and decline to hedge his bets with the French." Saigon 2712 Feb 65

((i.e., to prove his reliability as an ally--so as to gain benefits from our attitude and behavior--he refrains from taking steps to improve his friendship with our "unfriendly ally," steps which would protect him if we failed him but which would make us suspicious that he would take steps contrary to our interests at some point.))

--or: Why aren't we doing any contingency planning for the possibility that budget constraints on military assistance will evaporate, and McN will want to go to Congress for a large supplemental?

Because: a) Such "planning" could be done on very short notice (? This last-minute planning usually consists of throwing in all the dogs that have rightly been rejected earlier, just to swell the request.

b) Mainly: We are doing everything we can to foster the impression inside the building and out, that more money will not be available.

((You want people to work very hard to ~~prepare~~ prepare for a situation, or conversely, to avoid all resistance to a situation, which they would not do if they regarded the outcome as rather uncertain--though that might be "realistic." The only way to get them to "act as if X would happen"--fully in terms of effort, enthusiasm, imagination, obedience--is to make them believe that X is almost certain to happen; and that may require that "one" (e.g., the DOD) "actually believe" that oneself: i.e., forego any planning or even internal discussion to the contrary.

Bureaucratic problem: people will work hard on something, i.e., "as if it were certain to be useful, or pertinent, or effective," if they think it is at least highly probable. If (they) think it is only fairly probable, it may be impossible to get them to work as fast as may be essential if it is to be ready in the event that it is needed.

Hence, it may be necessary to conceal uncertainty; including, foregoing planning for alternatives, or concealing from one planning group what other planning is going on (which would generate doubt in their minds)

Mortan

Issues: Pain of having this revealed — known at least to both
(this, unlabeled to reveal + cause pain).



Known qualities.
High control.
Highly reliable.
Compatible goals, beliefs, approach.

Revealed preference — Who do you pick, "when the chips are
down" (High stakes, hard problem —
speed, judgment, reliability).